bulletin number
10

OHTC
306.48
0594R/Mr

municipal recreation bulletin

Ministry of Community and Social Services

Youth and Recreation Branch

Public Relations

When a municipal council establishes a recreation committee, one of the responsibilities given to the new agency is that of informing the community of opportunities that are available, and of helping the citizens to understand the recreation policy developed by council and its recreation committee.

To do an adequate job, the committee should develop an orderly plan to publicize what is being offered during each season and to report on how the programs are going. Through the service it gives, through the attitudes expressed by its members and the recreation staff, and through its public relations, the municipal recreation committee can contribute to the public appreciation of leisure and recreation as an essential part of community life.

Nearly every expert who is asked to define public relations starts off by making the point that the good deeds must be carried out before anyone can tell about them in an effective way. Publicity cannot make dull programs interesting.

The goal of public relations

Public relations is basically the promotion of understanding. In developing its plan for public relations, the municipal recreation committee will need to define its main objectives. Perhaps they might be the following:

- to create an attitude of understanding and a climate in which the importance of providing for leisure is accepted;
- to develop wide appreciation of leisure programs and their value to the individual and to the community;
- to inform the people about recreational opportunities and interesting happenings in the community;
- to encourage all the community groups, agencies and associations in the recreation field to plan cooperatively.

Not only are good deeds necessary before good communication can be achieved, the people who impart the information must have a clear understanding of program objectives and the municipal recreation policy. The committee members themselves should know and understand the values of recreation as well as the needs and interests of various groups in the community. They should know the community's resources and all the organizations that provide programs of activities for their members or for the public. They should understand why the municipality operates certain programs and, in other cases, enables a community organization to take on the job.

The means of communication

The most effective means of communication, and sometimes the most neglected, are those between individuals—face-to-face conversations, personal letters and telephone calls.

Committee members and recreation staff should take every opportunity to write personal letters of thanks or congratulation, or to pass along information. The telephone call is a means of providing that last minute reminder, or of getting immediate action. Care should be taken not to misuse the telephone; the person-to-person feeling is lost when the same obviously "prepared" approach is used to call a large number of people.

Newsletters, annual reports, conferences, and committee meetings in the community are all indispensable tools in a program of public relations. These are the tools that are most useful in putting substance into the relationships between the committee and its close associates in the community.

In the case of small groups, communications can deal directly with those matters that are of significance to the members of the groups. It must be appreciated that public relations tools, such as the newsletter and the annual or seasonal report, do not allow for two-way communication. This often reduces their effectiveness unless they are used in combination with some method such as small gatherings or answer sheets that permits the free expression of opinion.

The field of "publicity" is often thought of as press notices, radio and television interviews, exhibits and posters. These tools can certainly be used to publicize recreation programs for the largest possible audience, but they must be used with discretion. Mass communications may make less impression on the individual than some of the more personal methods, unless the material is prepared with skill and care.

Preparing publicity material

A good newspaper story must be news. It should tell who is involved, what is happening, when and where, as well as how and why it is happening.

The public relations program may well begin with the establishment of communications between the recreation committee and the editor of the local paper. Consultation and discussion with the editor, or a designated member of his staff, will help the committee members to

prepare their news releases in the most convenient form and to deliver them to meet the paper's deadlines.

The speaker who accepts an invitation to address a large audience is also accepting the responsibility of providing the group with a meaningful, interesting and well-prepared speech. The platform provides the recreation committee member with an opportunity to inform and to gain understanding of the recreation program and the services in the municipality.

The successful speaker is just as direct and straightforward as he would be in communicating with an individual. He knows his subject, and he concentrates on communicating the ideas and ideals of recreation to his listeners.

Films, slides, demonstrations and exhibits are all excellent methods of telling the story to large numbers. The preparation of this kind of material requires great care in selection. Photographs, drawings and diagrams should illustrate the action as well as tell the story for the committee.

Simple but dramatic photographs and exhibits that tell a clear, straightforward story are usually more successful than those that attempt to encompass a large number of activities and interests. The planning and production of displays of this kind are time-consuming, and the location of these should be considered carefully to ensure that the maximum numbers will see it.

Radio stations in Ontario are often community stations with direct relationships in the municipality, or within a limited listening area. Many of the rules for the preparation of newspaper material also apply to radio, except that the stories have to be extremely brief to fit spot announcements. Consultation with the staff of the local radio station will help the committee to prepare acceptable material.

The manager of the radio station may be able to grant some free time to the committee's activities by giving them coverage in the local newscast, assigning some spot announcements, or including them in the schedule of public service programs. Parts of significant speeches may be broadcast, or the committee members and recreation staff members may take part in interviews and forums.